



**TO: ASSEMBLYMEMBER TONY THURMOND, CHAIR  
MEMBERS  
ASSEMBLY BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE 1, HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**

**FROM: SHARON RAPPORT, CORPORATION FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING**

**RE: BRINGING FAMILIES HOME: PROPOSAL FOR \$10 MILLION TO HOUSE CHILD-WELFARE  
INVOLVED FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

---

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) respectfully requests your consideration of a budget item for a “Bringing Families Home” Initiative, which would provide housing to homeless child-welfare-involved families. Evidence shows moving homeless families into permanent housing prevents foster care placement and furthers family reunification. Yet, county child-welfare systems and housing systems rarely collaborate. Focused resources spurring county investment would advance collaboration between child welfare and housing systems and end the cycle of foster care and homelessness among hundreds of participating families.

In the fiscal year 2014-15 budget process, CSH advocated for a \$3 million budget item. This year, we are requesting \$10 million. Recent data indicates more child-welfare-involved families need “supportive housing,” a more expensive intervention that combines permanent, affordable housing with services promoting housing stability. This research suggests focusing resources on families with greatest vulnerabilities could make a significant long-term impact on ending homelessness among child-welfare-involved families. County stakeholders also suggested \$10 million would offer sufficient incentive to create collaborations between housing and child welfare systems. Finally, given a longer-term grant commitment is more likely to foster housing opportunities for families, CSH determined each grant to a county should fund five years of subsidies for supportive housing, rather than the originally-proposed three-year proposal.

## **HOMELESSNESS AND FOSTER CARE**

While homelessness is not a basis for placement, homeless families have much higher rates of family separation than other low-income families. Many of the parents of these families experience substance use disorders, or are women exiting incarceration; for others, the stress of homelessness leads to neglect and maltreatment. Similarly, 25% of young adults aging out of foster care become homeless within four years. These young adults are increasingly repeating a cycle of homelessness and child welfare involvement with their own children.

- Almost half of children in foster care have a birth parent with a history of homelessness.<sup>1</sup>
- About 30% of children in foster care **could be reunited with families if the family had access to a safe place to live.**<sup>2</sup>

## **THE SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS IS HOUSING**

Housing is a critical component to reducing foster care placement and promoting reunification of families who have experienced homelessness. An independent study of a New York program providing housing and housing

---

<sup>1</sup> C. Zlotnick, D. Kronstadt, L. Klee. “Foster Care Children & Family Homelessness.” *Am. J. Public Health*. 88:1368-1370. 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Y.A. Doerre, Y.A. et al. (1996). *Home Sweet Home*. Washington, DC: Children's Welfare League of America Press.

stability services to homeless child-welfare-involved families revealed over 61% of the families' child welfare cases were resolved favorably within 10 months, cases that would otherwise take years to resolve. In fact, compared to a group of child welfare-involved families who remained homeless, families in housing **avoided foster care services by an average of 187 days over two years, both preventing foster care placement and reuniting families with children in foster care more quickly.** Finally, participating parents avoided additional investigations of child maltreatment complaints for the two-year period studied.

Studies similarly show housing reduces recidivism into jails and prisons. In fact, those exiting jail or prison are seven times less likely to recidivate when housed than when homeless. Accessing permanent housing, therefore, can allow homeless child-welfare-involved families a better chance at success.

## PROPOSAL

**A \$10 million State General Fund allocation would provide grants to counties willing to match State resources. Counties could use the dollars to fund housing for homeless families who either have been screened for family maintenance services or have children in foster care who are receiving reunification services, for whom housing would make reunification possible.**

**Through a competitive application process,** the Department of Social Services would choose three to five counties to receive matching funds. Counties would use up to 10% of the funds to meet reporting requirements and to hire a liaison to create relationships with existing programs. County programs would connect families to an existing process for assessing a homeless family's housing needs. **Based on assessed needs, counties would use remaining grant funds to offer two types of assistance to families:**

- **“Rapid re-housing” for about 750-800 families.** Rapid re-housing works to reduce barriers to accessing housing affordable to families in deep poverty by funding—
  - **Housing navigators who help families identify affordable places to live,**
  - **Security deposits,**
  - **Back utility payments,**
  - **Credit clean-up,**
  - **Face-to-face case management services that work with parents to develop good rapport with landlords, manage money, pay rent on time, and maintain housing stability,**
  - **Three to 12 months of housing subsidies.**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) identifies rapid re-housing as an evidence-based, inexpensive intervention to end homelessness among families who fall into homelessness due to deep poverty and an absence of social supports. Studies show 85-90% of families stabilize in housing, with families 4.7 times more likely to stay stably housed over the long term than families in shelters who do not receive rapid re-housing assistance. Counties receiving these funds should have rapid re-housing programs in place. Costs for staff and financial assistance in rapid re-housing average \$4,000 per family nationwide.

- **“Supportive housing” for about 135-140 families.** Supportive housing stabilizes families with disabilities who have been homeless for at least a year or at least four times within the last three years, as well as families facing significant barriers to housing stability (i.e., young parents aging out of foster care who struggle with mental illness or substance addiction). **Supportive housing offers—**
  - **Long-term subsidies to help families in deep poverty afford decent, safe housing,**

*For more information, contact Sharon Rapport at [sharon.rapport@csh.org](mailto:sharon.rapport@csh.org) or (323) 243-7424.*

- **Intensive, frequent, face-to-face multidisciplinary services that include—**
  - **Services to outreach to and engage heads of households who are distrustful of public systems,**
  - **Health care coordination, so families have easy access to needed medical, mental health, and substance use treatment, and**
  - **Services to help tenants maintain their housing, such as case management, life skills training, money management, food security, and benefits advocacy.**

Evidence indicates a number of families experiencing homelessness require a longer-term housing subsidy with services. Most counties already have well-established supportive housing programs, and have or are developing a process to prioritize families with higher needs to move into supportive housing. With this budget proposal, counties would partner with existing homeless systems to identify families who need supportive housing, to move families who need it into available housing, and to fund rental subsidies and supportive housing services. Supportive housing costs an average of \$20,000 per year. The budget item could pay for a grant that would fund rental subsidies and services for a five-year period, renewals subject to future budget items. The item would serve about 135 families for five years.

Multiple studies conducted over the last 25 years demonstrate supportive housing is the only model that works to end a family's experience of long-term or repeated homelessness. And studies show decreased foster care placement, and quicker reunification for an overall decrease in foster care days for child-welfare-involved families living in supportive housing, than for families with similar characteristics who remained homeless.

## THE PROCESS

Local child welfare systems and housing/homeless systems typically operate in silos. This proposal would not only **bridge these two systems** to promote more effective collaboration, it would offer much-needed and currently scarce resources to house this vulnerable population.

**The Counties' Role:** Counties receiving grant funds could use grants to fund a **liaison with responsibility for shepherding a relationship between child welfare agencies and community homeless/housing systems**. The liaison would work within the systems to navigate the following process:

- **Identify Eligible Families:** Child welfare staff would identify any family experiencing literal homelessness who is receiving family maintenance or reunification services as eligible.
- **Link to Assessment:** The liaison would link eligible families to a coordinated assessment and entry process within the community in which the family is homeless.
  - **Established Assessment and Entry Processes:** Community homeless systems receiving funds from HUD for homeless assistance are now required to create coordinated systems to assess an individual's or family's housing needs, and identify the right housing resources for that family. A liaison would be able to tap into these coordinated assessment and entry systems.
    - Assessments determine whether a family needs rapid re-housing or supportive housing to exit homelessness. Staff would use existing 10- to 15-minute assessments that assess length of homelessness, disabling conditions, history of incarceration, health history, functional ability, and other criteria to determine the housing assistance a family needs to exit homelessness.
    - An assessment typically takes factors into consideration of whether a family's head of household is struggling with barriers that would impede his/her ability to remain stably

*For more information, contact Sharon Rapport at [sharon.rapport@csh.org](mailto:sharon.rapport@csh.org) or (323) 243-7424.*

housed, such as—

- A combination of medical, mental or substance use disorders,
  - Repeated incarceration,
  - Repeated or long-term homelessness, or
  - Repeated or prior experience with foster care placement.
- Counties with established coordinated assessment and entry systems should be awarded higher points in a competitive grant application process. If a county does not have such systems in place, the county would have to describe how it intends to coordinate assessments and entry processes through its existing homeless systems, without using additional funds to do so.
- **Move Families Into Housing:** Based on a family’s assessed need for rapid re-housing or supportive housing, homeless assessment and entry systems would take every available action, including placement in housing available outside of the county, to move families into permanent housing as soon as possible. If a county must use housing resources outside of its jurisdiction, the county would be responsible for funding the program.
  - **Pay for Housing and Services: The county would funnel housing and services resources directly into a receiving county’s homeless system** to administer payment for rental subsidies and services promoting housing stability. County entities could administer programs through contracts with non-profit organizations, continuum of care entities, housing authorities, or other designated systems with experience administering rental subsidies and services.
  - **Evaluate Outcomes:** Counties receiving grant funds would be required to track outcomes of participating families, including—
    - Housing retention,
    - Reunification with children in placement, and
    - Avoidance of placement in foster care, as compared to other families still homeless.

## FOSTERING LOCAL-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

To be eligible for State funds, **counties would have to show that they are investing matching money in housing for child-welfare-involved families through—**

- County turn-over Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers set aside for the population, not already set-aside for people experiencing homelessness;
- County partnerships with affordable housing developers who have received County housing funds, provided the housing provider is willing to set aside affordable apartments for homeless child-welfare-involved families;
- Other housing funds, such as local affordable housing trust funds or county general fund housing dollars for rental assistance, rapid re-housing, or supportive housing services, if the county adds resources to end homelessness among child-welfare-involved families; or
- County child welfare funds to reduce foster care placement or expedite family reunification.

Counties would be allowed to pool their resources regionally to make available a broader range of housing options. Given the limited funding available under this grant opportunity, an estimated two to five counties or regional county collaborations would be able to create and run a “Bringing Families Home” program.

### Staff Contact:

**Sharon Rapport, Associate Director, California Policy, CSH**  
[sharon.rapport@csh.org](mailto:sharon.rapport@csh.org), or (323) 243-7424.

*For more information, contact Sharon Rapport at [sharon.rapport@csh.org](mailto:sharon.rapport@csh.org) or (323) 243-7424.*

## **BUDGET FOR CSH BUDGET PROPOSAL (2015)**

### **BRINGING FAMILIES HOME INITIATIVE: HOUSING FOR HOMELESS CHILD-WELFARE-INVOLVED FAMILIES**

Counties receiving grant funds must match State funds, and access existing housing and homeless systems in their community. Estimates of State costs would include the following:

#### **I. DSS Costs to Create and Evaluate a State Program: \$300,000-325,000**

*Department of Social Services:* Staff costs to develop a county selection process and establish methods of collecting county data:

- Estimated State costs of developing a county selection process and oversight of the Initiative would total \$200,000.
- Estimate of costs of overseeing an evaluation of data would total \$100,000-125,000.

#### **II. Costs to Create a County Program: \$1,005,000**

*Child Welfare Agency Liaisons:* A liaison would create relationships with homeless systems and develop a process for referring families to coordinated assessment and entry systems.

- Estimated costs of hiring liaisons to develop partnerships with coordinated assessment and entry systems total \$124,000 per county, with the State's share of the costs of \$62,000 per year. The State's overall total costs would total an average of \$186,000 per year, or \$930,000 over 5 years.

*Contracts or Memoranda of Understanding:* The State could incur costs of local staff to reach agreement with other county, city, or non-profit agencies to administer housing subsidies, provide services, and coordinate child-welfare and housing activities.

- State costs of establishing partnerships with homeless systems would total \$75,000.

#### **III. Homeless Child Welfare Involved Families Needing Rapid Re-Housing Programs: \$2,200,000**

*Rapid Re-Housing Services:* Providing housing location services, security deposit assistance, short- and medium-term or shallow rental subsidies, move-in costs, back payment of utility bills, and other potential assistance to about 750-800 families.

- Rapid re-housing assistance would cost the State approximately \$2,000-3,000 per family, for a total State costs of about \$2,200,000 to serve about 750-800 families.

#### **IV. Homeless Child Welfare Involved Families Needing Supportive Housing: \$6,500,000**

*Supportive Housing:* Providing rental subsidies for apartments without limit on length of stay, along with services intended to allow a family to access and maintain housing stability, to about 125-135 families over a five-year period.

- Supportive housing programs, on average, cost \$20,000 per year, for a State's share of costs of \$10,000, per year. State costs would total about \$6,500,000 to house 125-135 families for a 5-year period.